

Campaign update
March 2004



Election 2004:

Working locally to make a difference nationally

As the impact of the Spanish bombing is assessed, one thing is clear - security will be at the heart of the next Federal Election. Whether we see truthful approaches or fear campaigns is partly up to us.

More and more, everywhere we go, people want to talk about the upcoming federal election.

Australians from all walks of life are seeing the positive impact they have had for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. There is growing support for the refugees on temporary protection visas. It should have been no surprise that when Australians got to meet and know and work alongside refugees they would welcome them – and want them to stay. The people of Australia – in Murray Bridge and Shepparton and city suburbs – have led some of our politicians to positions of support, including members of the government.

There has been a reduction in the numbers of children in detention – not as great a reduction as Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone would have us believe, as she attempts to hide the government's shame by moving children from detention centres and locking them up in residential housing projects, and by conveniently forgetting the 83 children in Nauru.

The government has gone from boasting about their policies, to having to justify them, to now trying to hide them. But we all know there is so much more to do.

There are still over 450 people in long-term detention in Australia – that's far too many. Fifty percent of those detained in Australian centres have been there for over two years, 25% for over three years. Some have been detained for over five years. There are still 277 people detained in Nauru, and still about 9000 refugees fearing the expiration of their temporary protection visas - and then return to Afghanistan or Iraq where our troops are still engaged.

It will take great efforts from all of us this year to end this ongoing punishment of the innocent, this de-humanising and unnecessary abrogation of fundamental rights. This year, an election year, the refugees and asylum seekers of Australia need you to recommit.

We are extremely grateful for your support over the last two years – without you we would not have been able to continue. **Continued on page 2**

"This year, an election year, the refugees and asylum seekers of Australia need you to recommit."

Inside...



Inside see all the photos from AJA's Australia Day Picnic

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- Children in detention – a hidden shame



Federal Election 2004: A campaign for all of us

From page 1 ... People are asking us “what are you planning?” and, more importantly, “what can I do?”

A Just Australia is working with our friends and colleagues to send a message to politicians that we are still as mad as hell about what our Government has done to some of the world’s most vulnerable people - and that most Government MPs have done nothing about it.

We will be targeting marginal seats across Australia, as well as running a strong campaign calling upon people to use their vote for a Senate that stands for accountability, honesty and democracy.

We are also undertaking opinion polling and focus group research to back up our policy work, and a strategic on-the-street campaign to grab the attention of the nation.

Federal Election Here’s what you can do

1. Sign on to be a part of the campaign by emailing us with your postcode or, if you know it, the federal electorate you live in to: mail@ajustaustralia.com. This will help us determine how you can be a part of locally-based campaign activity, and where we need to devote campaign resources.

2. Think about how you are going to use your Senate vote, and how you might be able to get others to think about it also.

3. Consider making a donation to the campaign – opinion polling and billboards come with a price tag, and we need to raise \$150,000 to make an impact.

4. Keep visiting the *A Just Australia* website www.ajustaustralia.com to find out what’s happening nationally, and in your local area.

Children in Detention: Australia’s Hidden Shame

Australia’s hidden shame – 156 children still detained in March 2004.

Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone recently claimed there were only 13 ‘boat people’ children in detention (*The Age*, 14 Feb). One child in detention is one too many and 15 in detention would be 15 more than there should be – but the simple fact is that creative accounting hides the truth about Australia’s ongoing shameful detention of children.

There are 156 children detained by Australia (see chart, below.) Most of them (83) are on Nauru. Many of the detained children have been moved into “residential housing projects” (RHP) and so have been left out of the Minister’s reckoning, despite the fact that the children remained locked up, under 24 hour guard.

A Just Australia produces a monthly bulletin on the numbers of children in detention. You can find the latest updates at www.ajustaustralia.com.

Breakdown of who is locked up where, below.

Location	Boys	Girls	Total
Baxter	5	3	8
Port Augusta RHP	9	6	15
Pt Hedland	4	0	4
Pt Hedland RHP	2	0	2
Villawood	12	16	28
Maribyrnong	1	0	1
Perth	0	0	0
Christmas Island	10	5	15
Total formal detention	43	30	73
Nauru	48	35	83
Other detention*	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	Up to 98
Total	At least 97	At least 75	At least 156

Australia Day Picnic



Australia Day Picnic and Ferry Ride on Sydney Harbour for Hazara community

Refugees from western Sydney on Temporary Protection Visas celebrated Australia Day on Sydney Harbour with *A Just Australia*. The girls from Afghanistan led the way in singing 'Advance Australia Fair'. A friendly soccer match was played with the Falun Dafa team at a picnic - a very visible presence on our national day.



Nauru - a stolen future

Thirty months after the tragedy of Tampa, 276 forlorn people remain trapped on Nauru, 83 children among them. The majority of the Nauru detainees (203) are Afghans.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has accepted nine claims for refugee status and is deciding on 13 others. All these people arrived on the Tampa. The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs is reviewing 181 other Afghans, using new country information from UNHCR that outlines how circumstances have changed – in many cases deteriorated dangerously. This review is meant to be completed 'within weeks'. Given their experiences with inadequate translators and hardhearted bureaucrats, it is no wonder the detainees are far from convinced they will get a fair hearing.

The Iraqis remain the other main group in limbo. Nine are waiting resettlement in New Zealand, and 55 remain detained indefinitely. While the bombs go off in Baghdad, and the Iraqi and international death toll rises, the Iraqi families on Nauru wait, listless and forlorn, forsaken by the Australian government who sent them there.

Stranded with them are Palestinians, Iranians and Bangladeshis – trapped with nothing to look forward to other than an indefinite sentence in their isolated prison.



Nauru Appeal

The invitation we negotiated for a medical team to visit Nauru and assess the detainees was withdrawn by the Nauru Government, after the hunger strike ended. We believe this was the result of Australian Government pressure.

A Just Australia has since held meetings in New Zealand with key agencies to build support for our campaign; supported a further visit by Marianne Dickie to Nauru to report on conditions; held a second "Nauru Summit" to coordinate campaign approaches; and obtained video of the conditions in the camp, part of which can be viewed on our website (see p.4).

As we undertook to you, the funds we raise will continue to support the campaign to end Nauru detention and the Pacific Solution.



Left: Child Asylum seekers outside their housing on Nauru. Centre: peacefully protesting their conditions Photos from nauruwire.org

In the news ...

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports falling numbers of asylum seeker applications in industrialised states at the same time as anti-immigrant and refugee sentiment continues to rise in Europe.
- The Australian Government rules out closing down the detention centre on Manus Island even though its sole occupant is a stateless Palestinian who has been recognised as a refugee.
- Australian politicians and press go into hysterics over 15 people arriving at Ashmore Reef, later revealed to be mislead Indonesians looking for fruit-picking work.
- * Nauru and Australia sign a \$22.5 million deal to extend the detention centre until at least June 2005.

Highlights of our recent work

- Meeting with Amanda Vanstone in February
- An election workshop in Melbourne
- Co-hosting functions with Labor for Refugees at ALP National Conference
- A planning meeting on the subject of long-term detainees, Adelaide
- Claudia Karvan and Howard Glenn addressing a NSW Teachers Federation special event

To view an **exclusive video** filmed for *A Just Australia* from within the Nauru detention centre visit www.ajustaustralia.com



Photo credit: www.nauruwire.org

What's new?

- 'It's Time for a Refugee Policy we can be Proud of, Again' – A Just Australia's latest policy document released on Australia Day for public discussion and feedback.
- Exclusive footage from Nauru, filmed by detainees using a digital camera sent to them by A Just Australia.
- The monthly 'children in detention report' highlights two contrasting government attitudes to locking up children: pretending they are not being detained in Australia; pretending they are not our responsibility in Nauru.
- Regularly updated events are listed and can be posted on the website by emailing mail@ajustaustralia.com.
- Don't forget to sign on for the election campaign (p.1-2)

To find out more about all the latest, visit and bookmark www.ajustaustralia.com.

New Victorian Office

Tiffany Overall (Victoria Campaign Coordinator) leads a new office we have opened in Victoria (details below). She joins our National Secretariat of Howard Glenn (National Director), Damien Spry (Communications Manager), Hugo Scales (Administration) and Ryan Heath (Projects).

Lend us a hand! Donate



Photo credit: Jonathan Bart

Get active and become a supporter. The first step is a one-off donation, but for as little as \$10 a month your monthly pledge can advance *A Just Australia's* campaign. We also ask you to write letters or take action from time to time.

If you can help, please email mail@ajustaustralia.com or simply post a donation to us at our addresses listed below.

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